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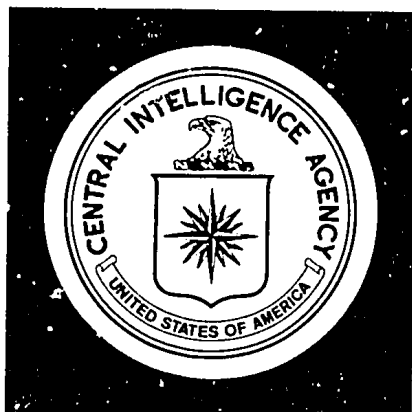
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Readi. Post. of Soviet Maj. Warships: Operational Implica.

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# Intelligence Report

*Readiness Posture of Soviet Major Warships:  
Operational Implications*

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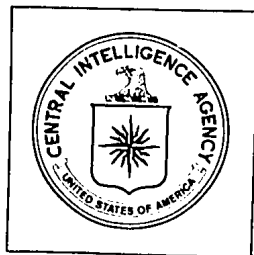
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## Readiness Posture of Soviet Major Warships: Operational Implications

### Key Findings

On the average, 75 to 80 percent of the Soviet Navy's major surface warships are ready for combat operations or could be brought to such a state within a 60-day warning period.

- About half the force could be ready for combat operations within a day or two.
- Another 25 to 30 percent could be ready for combat operations within 60 days.
- The rest of the force—those units in shipyards for long-term overhaul or modernization—probably could not be ready for combat operations even with several months' warning.

The Soviets keep most of their combat-ready ships in home waters rather than having large numbers routinely deployed at sea. This policy is in accord with Soviet views that:

- A war with the West would most likely begin only after a period of heightened tensions, which would allow Soviet forces time to deploy.
- Soviet naval surface forces would be employed primarily in waters near the USSR.

The chief advantage of this policy in the Soviet perspective is that it would be possible to have more ships ready for combat after a short period of warning than if large forces were kept at sea on a routine basis. This puts a premium, however, on the proper timing of the deployment of forces prior to hostilities. Thus, the Soviet posture is designed to maximize the readiness of these forces after mobilization, at some expense to their ability to respond to an unexpected crisis or surprise attack.

The pattern and levels of activity reached by Soviet naval forces in the early seventies evidently represent what the Soviets consider a reasonable balance between the tasks of defending the homeland and supporting state interests abroad. The Navy could sustain increased routine deployments in some areas without undue strain, but it has not developed the major overseas bases and maintenance facilities or the logistic capabilities that would be necessary to support substantial increases in deployments to areas more distant from the USSR.

The Soviet Navy is unlikely to change its current patterns and levels of operations unless there is a radical change in Soviet views on how a war with the West would develop and where major surface forces should be employed. The present policy allows flexibility for using ships to support peacetime roles while maintaining a large reserve of ships that would be quickly available in the event of war.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
July 1975

INTELLIGENCE REPORT

Readiness Posture of Soviet  
Major Warships: Operational Implications

Introduction

The fleet of major surface combatants--warships of ocean escort size or larger--is one of the main elements of Soviet naval power. It is the principal instrument for projecting military power to distant areas in peacetime, and it complements the combat capabilities of the Navy's submarine and aviation components, which the Soviets consider their main naval strike forces for wartime.

The USSR has maintained a large fleet of surface ships for many years, but until the mid-sixties these ships rarely ventured far from Soviet shores. Since that time, the level of Soviet naval activity in distant areas has risen and major surface forces have begun to carry out missions in areas where they could more easily come into contact, and perhaps conflict, with Western naval forces.

The major surface fleet currently includes about 220 ships based in four separate and distinct fleet areas. (See map, next page.) These ships vary widely in size and combat capability. Many of the newer ships appear to be well equipped for distant operations. About half the ships in the current inventory were designed and built primarily for operations in

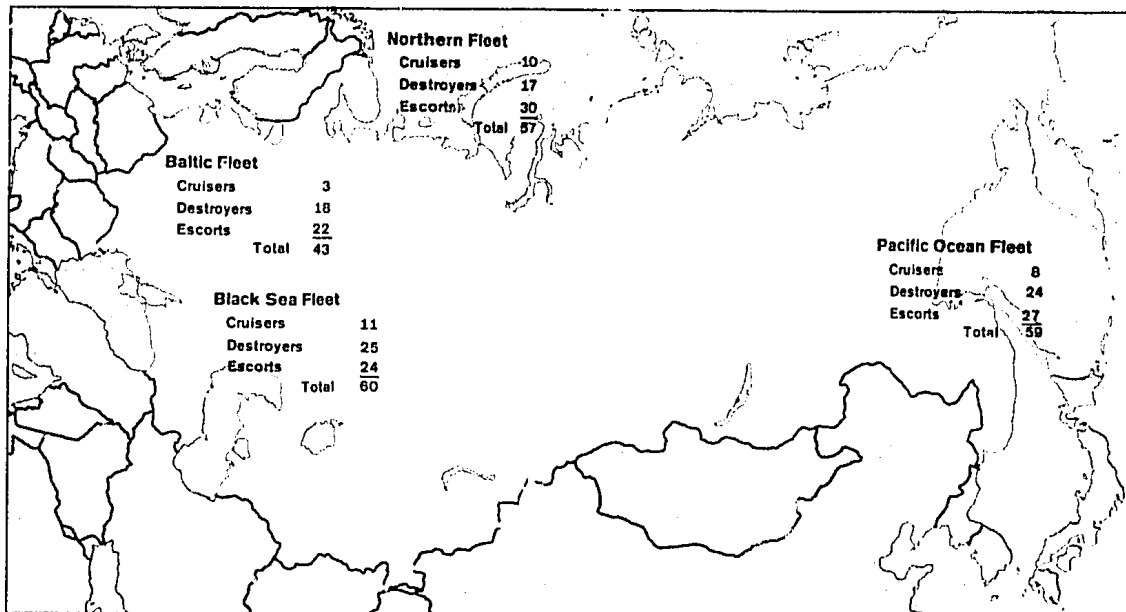
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*Comments and queries regarding this publication are welcome. They may be directed to [REDACTED] of the Soviet Strategic Forces Division, Office of Strategic Research, code 143, extension 4203.*

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# **Disposition of the Soviet Major Surface Force as of Midyear 1975**



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Soviet coastal waters, however, and these ships have a limited capability for sustained operations in distant areas. Although a few are used regularly to supplement operations away from home waters, the bulk of them are used only in home fleet waters.

The Soviets generally keep most of their combat-ready ships in home waters rather than having large numbers of them routinely deployed. Thus, the ability to deploy rapidly to forward operating areas is a critical factor in the overall effectiveness of the Soviet naval forces. This paper discusses the readiness and availability of Soviet major surface forces, and assesses the operational implications of the posture that the Soviets have chosen.

A summary begins on page 19.

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### Readiness Levels

The Navy, like other Soviet military forces, has three general conditions of combat readiness: constant, increased, and full. (See box.) Within these three conditions, the Soviets appear to have subcategories of combat readiness. As a ship progresses through these conditions, it approaches a fully combat-ready state.

Ships that the Soviets consider operationally available normally would be regarded as in "constant readiness." The other two general levels of readiness are alert conditions, and their use generally would be reserved for periods of heightened tension or crises preceding the outbreak of hostilities in which Soviet naval forces were expected to participate.

Under normal peacetime conditions about half the ships currently in the Soviet major surface force would qualify as operationally available or in "constant readiness"--those ready for combat or that could be ready within a day or two. Within this category, about 10 percent of the total force typically is deployed out of area, while about 40 percent of the force remains

#### **Definitions of Soviet Levels of Combat Readiness**

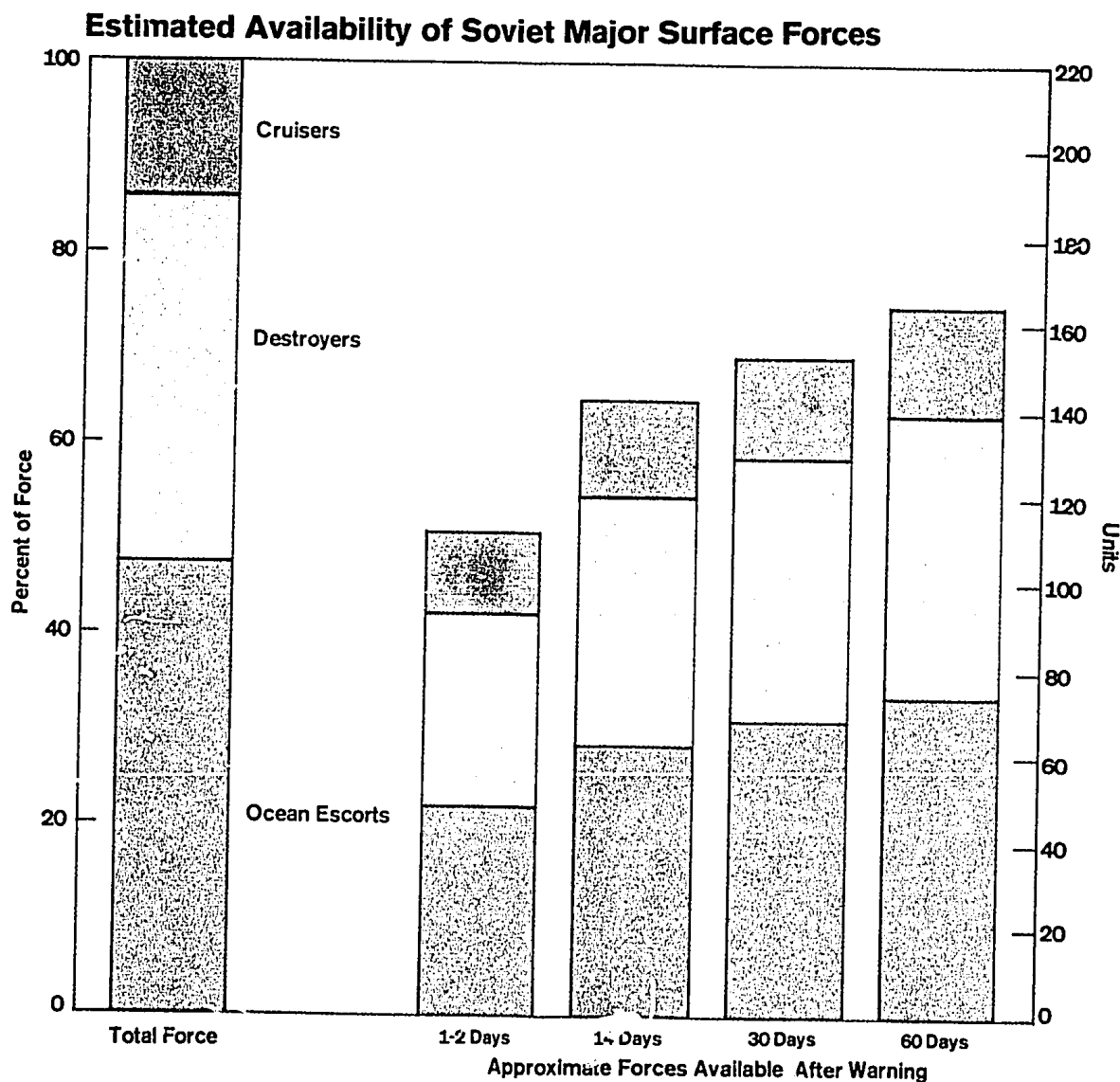
**Constant combat readiness** is the day-to-day state of preparedness of a unit and is characterized by routine activities such as training exercises, inspections, firing exercises, and ordinary leave routines. Units in "constant combat readiness" are not on alert, as the designation might imply. They are, however, units that are fully worked up, and they could deploy within a short time.

**Increased combat readiness** is an alert status in which units are required to take measures that will reduce the time needed to reach the highest state--full readiness. During this phase, personnel probably would be recalled from leave, exercises would be curtailed, and the ships would generally be made ready for combat.

**Full combat readiness** signifies that the units are ready for immediate combat operations. Crews probably are at battle stations, and weapon systems are ready to fire. In this phase, Soviet ships would be deployed to their likely areas of operation or to forward staging areas in anticipation of imminent hostilities.

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in Soviet home waters. An additional 25 to 30 percent of the major surface force is in a state of reduced readiness, but most of these ships probably could be made combat ready within two months. Some might not reach full combat readiness within this time but would be able to participate in limited operations. The rest of the force--some 20 to 25 percent--typically is out of service for long-term overhaul or modification. Most of these major surface ships would be unavailable for combat operations even with several months' warning. (See graph at left.)

In terms of the current force totaling about 220 units, between 105 and 115 ships typically could be combat ready within a day or two. Given a 60-day warning period, an additional 50 to 60 ships could be made operationally available.\* These figures can be misleading, however, because different ship classes have varying levels of readiness and availability. The newer Soviet ship classes, which present the greatest threat to Western naval forces, generally have a higher rate of availability than older, smaller classes. Some of the newer classes probably could approach 100 percent combat availability within a few weeks, whereas some older ship classes might not exceed 60 to 70 percent availability with much longer warning times. The actual number of available ships will vary from class to class and month to month depending on age, number of units in each class, and cycles for maintenance, overhaul, and modernization.

#### Ships in Constant Combat Readiness

Out of Area. The 10 percent of Soviet major surface ships routinely deployed out of area are stationed for the most part in the Mediterranean Sea, but the Soviets also maintain a small, continuous presence in the Indian Ocean. In addition, Soviet

\* A maximum warning time of 60 days was selected for this report rather than the 90-day warning period used in some recent national estimates. The longer period would enable the Soviets to bring a few additional ships into service, but it is believed that the major part of the buildup would be completed within 60 days.

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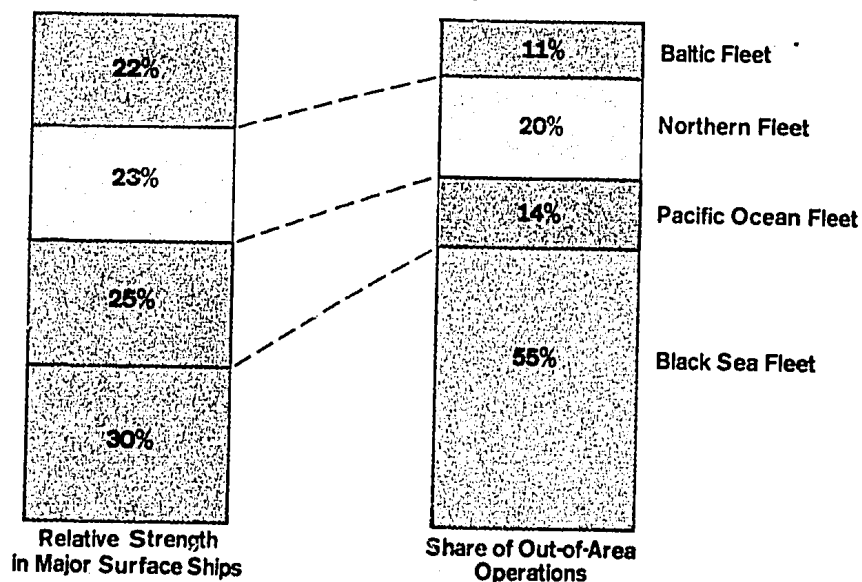
major surface ships exercise periodically with Cuban naval forces in the Caribbean and regularly support the Soviet presence in Guinea.

Average levels for out-of-area deployment vary among the major surface ship classes. The more modern classes of missile-armed cruisers and destroyers, for example, have an average deployment rate of some 16 percent. Older gun-armed destroyers and all classes of ocean escorts, on the other hand, deploy less often than the average.

The average deployment levels of Soviet major surface ships vary from fleet to fleet as well. During the period from mid-1971 to mid-1973, for example, the Black Sea Fleet--with about 30 percent of the total force--accounted for over half the time spent

### Comparison of Strength and Out-of-Area Activity of the Four Soviet Fleets

Mid-1971 to Mid-1973



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out of area by major surface combatants. This pattern of operations reflects that fleet's heavy commitment to support the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean Sea.

In Home Waters. That portion (40 percent) of the major surface force in home waters and ready for combat within a day or two provides the Soviet Navy with a capability for contingency deployments and crisis situations as well as a reserve of ships that would be quickly available in the event of war. Some of these ships probably are required to be able to put to sea within a few hours, while others may take up to two days.

#### Ships in "Reduced Readiness"

This category (25 to 30 percent of the major surface force) includes warships that are in shipyards for minor repair and those undergoing trials, training, or workup after extended repair, overhaul, or modernization. The first group typically consists of several ships undergoing routine repair work that cannot be done by a ship's crew. Such maintenance, evidently scheduled every one to two years, normally lasts 30 to 60 days. All of these units probably could regain an acceptable level of combat readiness within a 14-day warning period, however.

The second group is made up of ships emerging from an extended period in the shipyard. Each such ship undergoes a cycle of trials, training, and workup before it is again considered available for combat operations. During this time, it is exercised and tested systematically and the crew is given at-sea training in local waters. A unit going through the workup cycle apparently must pass proficiency tests--administered by permanent inspection teams--during each phase before going on to the next phase.

Although ships normally take four to six months to complete the cycle, the time needed to bring a ship to a level of constant combat readiness probably could be substantially shortened in an emergency. Given the appropriate priority, most of these ships

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probably could be made operationally available within 60 days. Those ships not able to attain full combat readiness within that time--perhaps 5 to 10 percent of the total force--probably would be far enough along in their post-overhaul workup to be used for some limited tasks in waters near the USSR.

#### Unavailable Ships

The remaining major surface ships--about 20 to 25 percent of the force--typically are out of service for overhaul or modernization work that probably would make them unavailable for combat operations even with several months' warning.

The Soviets attempt to give their ships periodic major overhauls which can last from about seven months to as long as two years, in order to maintain the combat efficiency of the units. Some evidence suggests that Soviet combatants are expected to undergo these overhauls every four years or so. In practice, however, the interval between them can vary from a few years to six or seven years.

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Operational Implications

The Soviet practice of keeping a high proportion of the combat-ready warships in home waters appears to reflect a deliberate policy choice rather than physical limitations on capabilities for routine operations in distant areas. The Soviets could easily sustain higher levels of peacetime deployments in some areas--the Norwegian Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the north-western Pacific Ocean, for example--if a policy decision were made to do so. These activities would not require major expansion of Soviet sea-based logistic support capabilities or the development of a network of major overseas bases and maintenance facilities. On the other hand, greatly expanded operations in more distant waters--such as the Indian Ocean or the Caribbean Sea--probably would require substantial improvements in both logistic support and basing facilities.

This posture appears to be based partly on naval doctrine that historically has emphasized defense of the homeland. It also reflects a view that a war with the West would start only after a period of heightened political tensions which would provide strategic warning. Although such a posture lowers the ability of naval forces to respond immediately to crises or surprise attack, it does enhance capabilities to concentrate naval striking power under the conditions the Soviets feel are most likely to prevail before the start of hostilities.

Wartime Operations

Soviet military strategists apparently believe that a period of heightened international tensions, characterized by a steady deterioration in the political climate, would precede the outbreak of hostilities. In this period, military preparations would be accelerated and naval forces would be pre-positioned in or near their operating areas.

Most wartime operations by major surface ships are expected to take place relatively near the USSR.

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[REDACTED] much of the major surface force probably would be assigned to help secure

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the straits leading out of Soviet home waters and to support the maritime flanks of the ground forces. Most of the ships assigned to the Northern Fleet, for example, probably would operate in the Barents and northern Norwegian Seas, attempting to secure the passages leading out of the Barents and to support operations against northern Norway. Units assigned to the Baltic Fleet are expected to concentrate their operations in the Baltic Sea, with the primary objectives of seizing the Danish straits in concert with ground forces and sealing off the area from enemy naval forces. Likewise, surface ships in the Black Sea Fleet would have the primary objectives of eliminating enemy naval forces in the Black Sea and aiding in the attempt to secure the Dardanelles. Pacific Fleet ships probably would attempt to clear enemy naval forces from the Sea of Japan and to control the straits leading out of it.

The principal area of operations by major surface ships outside home waters is expected to be in the Mediterranean Sea, where the Soviets keep a force of some 12 major surface combatants routinely on station. Given a period of strategic warning, the Soviets probably would attempt to reinforce these ships with additional units from the Black Sea Fleet. This force could be expected to operate primarily in the eastern Mediterranean, although some units might operate in the central and western Mediterranean as well.

Other operations beyond Soviet home waters probably would be quite limited, at least in the early period of the conflict. Some Northern Fleet ships might operate in the North Atlantic, however, and a few Pacific Fleet units could conduct periodic forays into the northwestern Pacific Ocean. Similarly, if Soviet forces could seize and hold the Danish straits, some Baltic Fleet units probably would begin operations in the North Sea. Operations in more distant areas such as the Indian Ocean or Caribbean Sea probably would be limited to the few units that might be caught in these areas at the outbreak of hostilities.

The current pattern of operations permits a large number of Soviet ships to be available for deployment



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to expected wartime operating areas within a short period of time, which is in line with the Soviet belief in the importance of maximizing combat forces before the start of hostilities. By keeping most ships in home waters, the Soviets feel they can have a larger number ready for combat after a short period of warning than they could if they routinely kept large forces at sea. Given the likely wartime operating areas of Soviet major surface ships, fully combat-ready ships probably could be on station within a week or two.

The current Soviet posture has some potential disadvantages for wartime operations, however, because of the premium it places on careful timing. Even with a warning period, an undue delay in the deployment of these forces during a period of rising tensions could leave them in a precarious position. To reach their likely operating areas, many units departing home waters must pass through restricted waters and choke points where they could be bottled up by enemy forces or by mining, at least during the opening stages of the war. On the other hand, a premature deployment of forces could also be a problem. Such an action might well give the adversary advance warning of Soviet intentions and might precipitate hostilities before the Soviets were fully prepared.

#### Crisis Reaction

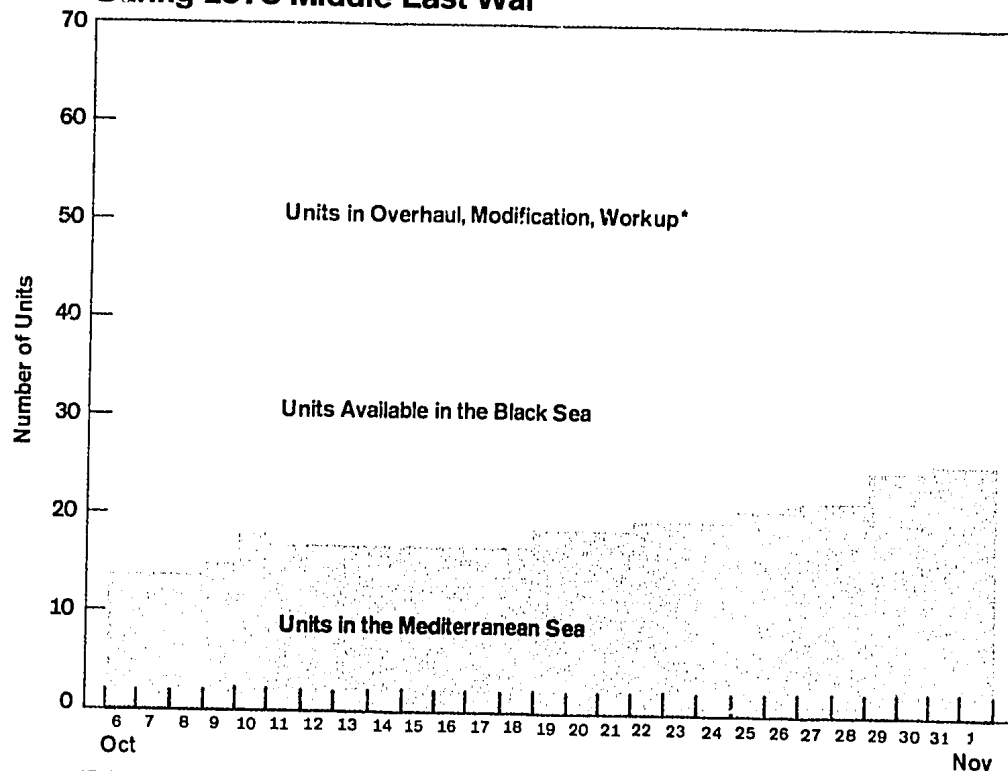
Because they have a large reserve of ships readily available, the Soviets can signal clearly the extent of their concern during a crisis with a substantial augmentation of the normally deployed force. Moreover, they have the option of tailoring the composition of the responding force to meet the requirements of the situation.

The Soviets have consistently shown both the ability and the determination to surge their naval forces in response to crises. The most recent example and perhaps the most illustrative was their reaction to the Arab-Israeli war of 1973. During

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### Status of Black Sea Fleet Major Surface Ships During 1973 Middle East War



\*Estimated; believed accurate within one or two units.

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that war the number of Soviet major surface warships in the Mediterranean Sea almost doubled, the Black Sea Fleet supplying the bulk of the increase. (See graph above.) This response probably was a near maximum effort for the Black Sea Fleet, given its requirement to retain some forces in home waters as a strategic reserve.

At the same time, however, a Soviet readiness posture predicated on keeping most of the available ships in home waters can complicate reactions to crisis situations. The relatively small force normally deployed represents the only Soviet immediate-reaction capability, whereas the presence of a larger force on the scene from the start might be sufficient in some cases to forestall the crisis. There is also

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the risk that a sudden deployment of large numbers of ships might be construed as a provocative act and might lead to an overreaction from other powers involved in the crisis.

The long transit distances between home waters and some potential crisis areas would hinder timely Soviet reinforcement. During the Soviet reaction to the India-Pakistan war in 1971, for example, warships deploying from the Pacific Ocean Fleet took over 10 days to reach the Indian Ocean. Additionally, the lack of extensive sea-based logistic support capabilities probably would make it difficult to keep a large force in distant areas for extended periods of time.

#### Peacetime Operations

During peacetime the Soviets probably feel that the practice of routinely deploying relatively few major surface ships to sea has several advantages. By holding most of its ships in home waters, the Soviets can provide them with regular maintenance, keeping a greater percentage available on short notice for operations. Moreover, this posture may be less expensive for the Soviets in terms of men and materiel, and it allows them to conserve the service life of the ships.

Crew training can also be accomplished more easily since most of it can be done in local waters under controlled conditions. At the same time, however, this type of training tends to be simplistic and stereotyped. In recent years Soviet naval writers have praised the efficacy of distant deployments as a method of training sailors, and they continually cite such voyages as proof that the Soviet Navy has become a force to be reckoned with in all parts of the world.

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Outlook: Stability of Deployment Pattern

The Soviet Navy does not appear to be planning to alter its current levels and patterns of operations significantly. Although there have been a few hints that the Soviets have been thinking about changing the pattern of naval operations, there is little evidence of change taking place.

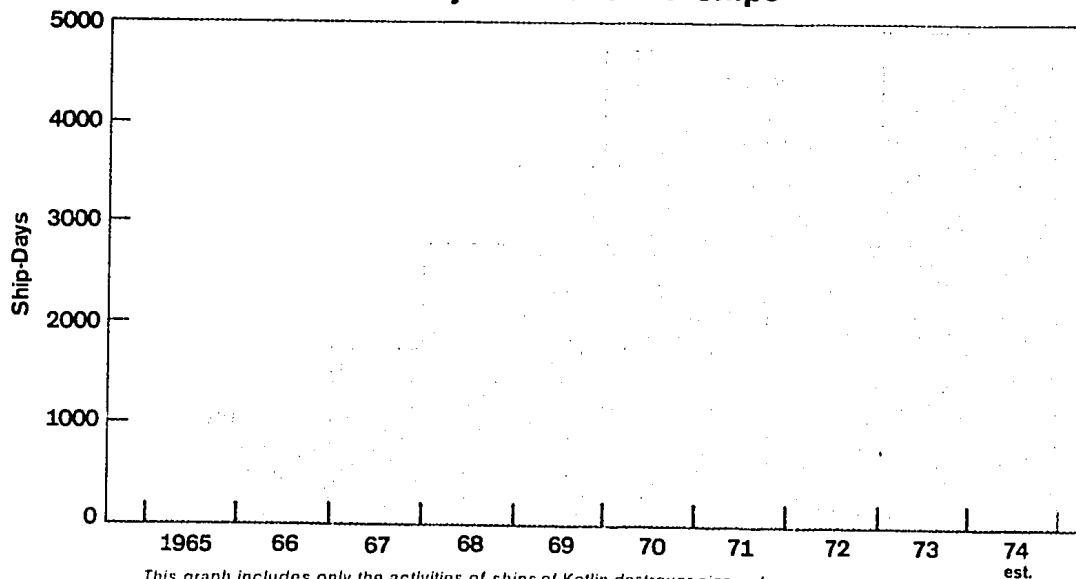
Admiral S. G. Gorshkov, commander in chief of the Navy, has suggested that if he were given larger ships with "great endurance and good sea-keeping ability" he could put more of them at sea, with the result that "fewer...ships [would be] needed in the fleet inventory." Soviet shipbuilding programs have, in fact, shown a trend toward larger and better equipped ships that are able to operate more efficiently in the open ocean. The newer classes of surface ships have improved endurance and better sea-keeping features, giving the Soviets an enhanced capability to maintain naval forces in distant areas for longer periods of time. The new classes probably will not be constructed in sufficient numbers to replace retiring older units on a one-for-one ratio, however. Thus an eventual overall decline in the number of ships in the Soviet Navy may offset higher levels of activity by the newer, more capable units.

The levels of routine deployments by Soviet major surface warships rose rapidly between 1965 and 1970 as the Soviet Navy expanded its role of supporting state interests abroad. Since 1970, however, this growth has slowed. (See graph at right.) The levels reached by the early seventies evidently represent what the Soviets consider a reasonable balance between the tasks of defending the homeland and supporting their interests abroad.

Although the Soviet Navy would be able to sustain increased levels of routine deployments in some areas without undue strain, it has not developed cer-

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**Out-of-Area Deployment Levels  
of Selected Soviet Major Surface Warships**



*This graph includes only the activities of ships of Kotlin destroyer size or larger. It excludes routine interfleet transfers. The peak occurring in 1970 was in large part due to the major Soviet naval exercise, Okean, which took place in the spring. The increased deployments shown in 1973 reflect the reaction of Soviet naval forces to the Middle East war.*

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tain capabilities that would be necessary to support a substantial increase in deployments to areas farthest from the USSR. It lacks a network of major overseas bases and maintenance facilities as well as sufficient logistic capabilities to support such operations routinely. Although the Soviet Navy is continuing to expand its at-sea logistic support capability, it is doing so at a pace which suggests that the program is of relatively low priority.

The Soviets have shown interest in using facilities in several areas of the world, and they have gained regular access to some ports to take on provisions and to perform minor upkeep and repair. Thus far, however,

they have not developed the type of forward bases with full facilities that would be needed to support greatly increased, long-term deployments. The most significant overseas facility currently being developed is located in Berbera, Somalia. Soviet units in the Indian Ocean routinely call at Berbera for replenishment, and the Soviets are building a cruise missile handling and storage facility there that will be able to provide support to those units. The Soviets also have built a communications facility there and modest facilities to provide shore rest for ship crews, and they have recently begun construction of an airfield. A repair barge in the port has provided minor upkeep and maintenance support to Soviet naval units on occasion, but there are no facilities available for major maintenance. While Berbera provides significant support for Soviet operations in the Indian Ocean, the facility would need major improvements before it could provide all the services of a regular Soviet naval base.

The Soviets show no sign of altering their views on how a war with the West would develop and where their major surface forces would be employed. Under these circumstances, the Soviet Navy is unlikely to change its current pattern and level of operations significantly. The present posture allows the Navy flexibility in using its ships to support peacetime roles while maintaining a large reserve of ships that would be quickly available in the event of war.

Summary

The Soviet major surface force--warships of ocean escort size or larger--is the principal instrument for projecting military power to distant areas in peacetime, complementing the wartime capabilities of the Navy's primary combat forces--submarines and land-based aircraft. A key factor in the ability of the surface force to perform these missions satisfactorily is the level of ship readiness and availability.

Readiness Conditions. Under normal peacetime conditions, about half of the major surface force would be ready for combat operations within a day or two. Within this category, about 10 percent of the total force is routinely deployed in forward operating areas, and about 40 percent remains in home waters, ready for combat operations on short notice. Another 25 to 30 percent of the force normally is in a reduced state of readiness, but most of these ships could be made combat ready within two months. The remainder of the force, between 20 and 25 percent, typically is in long-term overhaul or modification. Most of these ships could not be made operationally available even in several months' time.

Basis of Policy. The Soviet practice of keeping a high proportion of combat-ready warships in home waters appears to reflect a deliberate policy choice rather than physical limitations on capabilities for routine operations in distant areas. This policy is believed to be derived primarily from the Soviet view of how a war with the West would most likely evolve and where Soviet warships would most likely operate. Although such a posture lowers the ability of naval forces to respond immediately to crises or sudden attack, it does enhance the Soviets' capability to concentrate naval striking power under conditions they feel are most likely to prevail before the start of hostilities.

The Soviets apparently consider that a period of heightened political tension would precede any

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major conflict with the West. Such a period would allow time for naval forces to be brought to peak readiness and to reach their primary operating areas. [REDACTED] these areas are expected to be relatively near the USSR--the Norwegian Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the northwest Pacific Ocean.

Operational Implications. The current pattern of operations permits a large number of Soviet ships to be available for deployment to expected wartime operating areas within a short period of time, which is in line with the Soviet belief in the importance of maximizing combat forces before the start of hostilities. By keeping most ships in home waters, the Soviets can have a larger number ready for combat after a short period of warning than they could if they routinely kept large forces at sea. Given the likely wartime operating areas of Soviet major surface ships, fully combat-ready ships probably could be on station within a week or two.

In the framework of a major war with the West, reliance on a period of rising tensions to prepare and pre-position naval forces has potential shortcomings. Premature deployment of the forces could provide advance warning of Soviet intentions and might precipitate hostilities before the Soviets were fully ready for them. Conversely, because of restricted passages to the open ocean, an undue delay in deploying these forces could result in their being bottled up, at least during the opening stages of a war. And if the ships were required to remain on station for extended periods of time before the start of hostilities, they could soon overload Soviet sea-based logistic support capabilities.

The policy of holding most combat-ready ships in home waters could also delay Soviet responses to crises in Third World areas during peacetime. The ships normally deployed represent the only quick-reaction capability of the Soviet Navy, and their timely reinforcement could be hindered by long transit times from home waters. The deployment of additional units provides a signaling capability to demonstrate Soviet concern, but it might also be

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considered a provocative act and could lead to an overreaction from other powers involved in the crisis.

During normal peacetime operations, the present Soviet deployment practice has the advantage of facilitating regular repair cycles and conserving the operational life of the ships. Some aspects of crew training also can be carried out more easily under controlled conditions in local waters. The Soviets are aware that such training tends to be simplistic and stereotyped, however, and naval commentators consistently describe long ocean voyages as the best way to train sailors.

Continuing Posture. Although there have been a few hints that the Soviets have been thinking about changing the pattern of naval operations, there is little evidence of change taking place. Some Soviet leaders have suggested putting more ships routinely at sea, but levels of activity have been relatively constant over the last few years. The Soviets are building larger ships that are better able to remain in distant areas for long periods of time, but these new ships probably will not replace retiring older units on a one-for-one basis. An overall decline in the number of ships in the inventory may tend to offset the higher levels of activity expected of the new, more capable ships. Moreover, the Soviets have not developed a network of major overseas bases or the extensive sea-based logistic support capabilities which probably would be needed to support greatly expanded operations in areas more distant from the USSR. One of the newer Soviet overseas facilities, which is in Berbera, Somalia, is capable of providing routine logistic support but has no capability to provide major repair or maintenance.

In sum, it appears unlikely that the Soviet Navy will change significantly the current pattern and levels of its operations. The present posture allows flexibility in supporting peacetime roles, while maintaining a large reserve of ships that would be available on short notice in the event of war.